



# ***Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks***

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, June 27 – July 3, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

FWP thanks USFS West Fork District seasonals Andrea Shortsleeve and Sean Schoff for helping with trapping efforts in the East Fork Bitterroot area.

On 6/24, IDFG reported to FWP that a male wolf originally collared in the Hughes Creek pack was radio tracked to the East Fork of the Bitterroot (French Basin area). Bradley a regular monitoring flight flew on 7/1, but did not hear this wolf and it is presumed either still be in dispersal mode or heading back to Hughes Creek. The Hughes Creek pack is a MT/ID border pack just over the state line in the N. Fork of the Salmon River area.

This week: Bradley confirmed 4 pups in Divide Creek (south end Bitterroot Valley); Lance confirmed pups in Trail Creek (Big Hole), Rich confirmed 4 pups in Welcome Creek (north end Bitterroot Valley); Ross confirmed pups in the Toadflax and Horse Creek packs (Madison Valley); Asher confirmed pups in the Eagle Creek pack (south end Paradise Valley) and the Beartrap pack (Spanish Peaks south of Bozeman).

Bradley pulled traps in the West Fork Bitterroot – no captures. Lance pulled traps in the Big Hole (Pintler pack), and Asher pulled traps in Eagle Creek. Boyd pulled traps in the Murphy Lake area.

Flights: Ross flew in southwest Montana on 6/29. Asher flew in southwest Montana on 7/1 and 7/2. Bradley flew on 7/1.

## **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 6/27, lethal control efforts for Benchmark and Grasshopper packs concluded. No additional wolves were killed and no livestock have been confirmed killed / injured in the last 45 days.

On 6/29, WS investigated a report of a dead calf in Elk Park north of Butte. It was not killed by a wolf (unconfirmed).

On 6/29, Wildlife Services confirmed that a calf had been killed by wolves on public land east of Wisdom. Wildlife Services has been authorized to collar and release one wolf and kill two wolves. The permittee has been authorized a SOS permit for their private and leased lands in the area. On 6/30, a second calf (owned by a different producer) was confirmed killed on private land east of Wisdom. The McVey pack was most likely involved with both depredations and had several incidents of confirmed cattle kills previously. WS successfully collared an adult male on 6/30. Efforts to remove two wolves continue.

On 6/30, WS investigated a dead calf found by the Blackfoot Challenge Range Rider Peter Brown in the Elevation pack territory. It was killed by a bear (thus unconfirmed), but wolf tracks were also found.

On 7/2, FWP talked with 2 area landowners / cattle producers near Gold Creek Rd. (south of Hamilton) regarding wolf activity. On 7/1, one of them saw 2 wolves chasing cattle (cow/calf pair operation), but no cattle were injured or killed. On 6/29, a different area landowner reported seeing 3 wolves cross a county road.

On 7/3, WS confirmed that 2-3 wolves had killed a calf on private land near Hall in the old Willow Creek territory. The Willow Creek pack was removed in 2008 for chronic depredations on private land, despite nonlethal efforts with fladry, increased human presence with range riders, hazing/harassing etc. A single collared wolf has been in the area in 2009 and area landowners have reported up to about 3 wolves. WS was asked to do some scouting to see if the collared wolf is still using the area and may have formed a new pack. WS is authorized to collar any new wolves captured and to remove 1 wolf.

CORRECTION – FWP previously reported that on 6/20, WS investigated a dead calf on private land southwest of Valier. The calf was discovered a couple days prior to the reporting to WS and the investigation. Wolf tracks were found in the area and had fed on the carcass. A grizzly bear had also taken over the carcass since the discovery and reporting. It was determined to be a probable wolf kill. The calf actually died in the Bennie pack territory and was much closer to the E. Front than previously reported.

## **Outreach and Education**

Nothing to report.

## **Research Activities**

Nothing to report.

## **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

On 6/25, a landowner shot a collared gray wolf on private land in the Martinsdale area. FWP retrieved the carcass and determined the wolf was from the Lebo Peak pack. The incident is under investigation.

## Other

### NEW -- Delisting Litigation Formally Starts

On June 2, a coalition of 13 groups, represented by the law firm EarthJustice, challenged the USFWS delisting decision in Federal District Court in Missoula (9<sup>th</sup> Circuit). The complaint alleges the USFWS delisting decision was an arbitrary and capricious violation of the federal Endangered Species Act for a variety of reasons. A request for a preliminary injunction (which if granted by the Court, would keep federal ESA protections in place during the litigation) has not been filed at this time. The Greater Yellowstone has also filed a lawsuit challenging the federal delisting decision. The groups will be represented by their own attorney's, respectively, but the cases were consolidated. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will seek to intervene in the Missoula Court on behalf of the State of Montana. Montana supports federal efforts to delist wolves.

Additionally, the State of Wyoming filed a lawsuit in the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit (Cheyenne Wyoming) challenging USFWS's rejection of Wyoming's regulatory framework and state plan.

### Background for Montana

On May 4, gray wolves in Montana were delisted. Conservation and management are guided by Montana laws, administrative rules (ARM 12.9.1301 – 12.9.1305), and the state's federally-approved plan. Wolves in Montana were automatically reclassified to a "species in need of management" statewide on May 4. The gray wolf is protected statewide, though individual wolves may be hazed, harassed, or killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock. Incidents must be reported and each will be investigated. Wolves may also be killed to protect human life. See the FWP wolf web page for a Fact Sheet and answers to frequently asked questions about delisting. The FWP wolf web page also has information about state law and regulations and what livestock owners can do to protect livestock. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season: FWP and the FWP Commission continue efforts to develop and prepare for a potential 2009 season. The season structure previously adopted by the FWP Commission is still in place for a potential fall 2009 season. But FWP and the FWP Commission must still establish a quota (the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters) for 2009. The public comment opportunity for establishing final 2009 wolf hunting quotas closed on June 19. FWP is recommending a total statewide quota of 75 wolves, spread out between 3 Wolf Management Units, with a subarea subquota of 2 wolves in the North Fork Flathead River drainage. The FWP Commission is expected to establish the final 2009 wolf season quota during a July 8th meeting in Helena at the FWP Headquarters building. The full agenda is available on the FWP Website.

### Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

Nothing to report. The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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